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## Utah gypsum mine OK'd near St. George

A proposed gypsum mine has been approved on the outskirts of St. George over the objection of hundreds of residents who say it will spoil open land around a retirement community.

Washington County commissioners voted Tuesday to grant a zoning permit subject to conditions on limiting dust, noise and truck traffic.

Commissioners said the conditional-use permit will be good for a year, when Good Earth

Minerals will have to reapply to continue operating, The Spectrum of St. George reported.

The gypsum deposit is five miles west of the SunRiver community on 11 acres of public land managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. About 3,200 residents live in the subdivision along the Virgin River.

"All this talk of 'it's going to become a mining town' is just ridiculous," company consultant

Fred Johnson told The Spectrum in July.

Good Earth Minerals said Tuesday it will operate only during daytime and shut down if winds top 30 mph.

An environmental assessment by the Bureau of Land Management says Good Earth Minerals plans to dig up 800,000 tons of pure gypsum over as many as 20 years.

Company representative Travis Christiansen said trucks will haul out the material via old Highway 91, avoiding an access road from Bloomington, a St. George subdivision near SunRiver.

Nearly 750 people signed a petition opposing the mine, The Spectrum reported. About half a dozen residents spoke up during Tuesday's two-hour hearing. One said he was not opposed.

Deputy Washington County Attorney Eric Clarke told commissioners they could not be swayed by public opposition.

"If you're going to deny a permit, you need to have substantial evidence. You can't base your decision solely on public comment," Clarke said.

The BLM ruled the project would have no significant environmental impact, but the agency ordered the company to keep Mojave desert tortoises from the mine site with a critter-proof fence.

The BLM also ordered the company to seed the land after mining with saltbush, sweetclover, brittle bush and other plants.

Gypsum is most commonly used in construction for fire-resistant drywall.

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(<http://www.heraldextra.com/news/state-and-regional/utah/utah-gypsum-mine-ok-d-near-st-...> 8/22/2012)